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Presidential Town Hall Meetings focus on projects, \$554 million settlement



Vice President Shelly Rex Lee Jim delivered the State of the Navajo Nation address for the start of the 2014 fall session. During the address, he mentioned the town hall meetings hosted by OPVP and said there cannot be two many meetings when it comes to hearing the voice of the Navajo people. (Photo by Rick Abasta)

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz.—The Navajo Nation Executive Branch began hosting town hall meetings to discuss the \$554 million settlement agreement and how to best utilize or invest the funds.

The first meeting was held on Oct. 21 at Shiprock Chapter House and brought in more than 100 people for the meeting.

President Shelly said the participation of the general public is important before a single penny of the \$554 million settlement is spent. Executive Branch staff was on hand to explain processes for building and road construction, two major areas of concern by most chapters.

Other areas of consideration included the Former Bennett Freeze Area, housing, agriculture, rangeland management and construction of nursing homes.

During the initial announcement

of the settlement in May 2014, President Ben Shelly instructed his staff from the Office of the President and Vice President to host the meetings to include the voice of the Navajo people.

The purpose of the meetings is to gather feedback on the how Navajo people across the Nation, especially since the Executive Branch is charged with administering the laws created by tribal legislators.

“Funding from the settlement agreement belongs to the Navajo people. We must reach out to them and ensure their voice is heard. Public comment meetings do not belong with one branch of the government,” he said.

Recent media reports stated the Navajo Nation Council raised concerns with the Executive Branch town hall meetings for fear of confusing the Navajo people.

“To say the Navajo people may be confused by additional discussions is an insult to the voting body of our Nation,” President Shelly said. “Our town hall meetings will cover profiles of the Navajo Nation, including our investment portfolio balances and the future projected revenue.

“The Navajo people need the proper information to make an informed decision,” he added.

While the public hearings held by the council are open-ended discussions on what the general public would like to see, the town hall meetings hosted by OPVP is focused on shovel ready projects such as the five-year Capital Improvement Projects plan and the Tribal Transportation Improvement Projects plan.

These project listings have already been prioritized and assessed by the chapters across the Nation and have obtained

the necessary clearances such as archaeological and environmental surveys.

Arbin Mitchell, chief of staff, said in this way, the projects are ready to go once funding is established.

“A lot of the projects have been in development for years, based on the needs of the chapters. They’ve already been in the system and only require funding,” Mitchell said.

The next town hall meetings will take place at Chinle Chapter House on Oct. 22, Navajo Technical University on Oct. 23, Ft. Defiance Chapter House on Oct. 28 and Tuba City Chapter House on Oct. 29. All meetings will be from 3 to 7 p.m.

The finale will showcase the comments and information received from all five agencies and will be at the Window Rock Sports Center on Nov. 11.

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